

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PA AT KAURI POINT, BIRKENHEAD, AUCKLAND

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Abstract. A radiocarbon date for the headland pa at Kauri Point, Birkenhead, is reported. This suggests that the site was constructed and occupied relatively recently. Analysis of charcoal recovered from the test excavations in 1971 indicates that the site was in a cleared area surrounded by kauri-dominated podocarp forest.

The pa at Kauri Point (N42/27; R11/35) occupies a prominent headland on the northern shore of the Waitemata Harbour. It is an almost ideal setting for a fortified site, requiring very little artificial defence, and is strategically located on the edge of the main harbour channel overlooking access to the upper harbour and close to good fishing grounds. Despite these advantages, the site appears to have been occupied only briefly. Test excavations in 1971, recently reported (Davidson 1990), revealed minimal structural evidence in the interior of the pa and only a small amount of midden and other cultural debris.

THE AGE OF THE OCCUPATION

A sample of *Chione stutchburyi* shell was dated by the Nuclear Sciences Group, DSIR Physical Sciences, Gracefield. The sample was taken from the fill of a drain-like depression at the back of a slight artificial terrace in Area A (Davidson 1990: Figs. 3 and 4). The initial determination was as follows.

NZA881 $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ $0.64 \pm 0.1\%$
conventional radiocarbon age 840 ± 120 B.P.

The calibrated age, as calculated by the laboratory, was A.D. 1290 to 1716 (95% confidence level) and A.D. 1413 to 1627 (68% confidence level).

This sample was one of three submitted at the same time from different sites, all of which were reported with unacceptably high standard deviations. Although the Kauri Point date was older than expected, it was queried not for this reason, but because the size of the

standard deviation rendered the result virtually useless as a means of placing the Kauri Point site within the span of Auckland prehistory. The laboratory undertook to run all three samples again. In the event, two further determinations were made on the Kauri Point sample with the following results.

NZA1070 $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ $0.41 \pm 0.1\%$
conventional radiocarbon age 632 ± 75 B.P.

NZA1735 $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ $0.50 \pm 0.1\%$
conventional radiocarbon age 519 ± 60 B.P.

The calibrated ages, as calculated by the laboratory, are as follows.

NZA1070 CAL. A.D. 1522 to 1894 (94%) 1938 to 1950 (1%)
1611 to 1815 (68%)

NZA1735 CAL. A.D. 1680 to 1950 (95%)
1696 to 1865 (68%)

The laboratory advises (Rodger Sparks, pers. comm. 1991) that the initial determination (NZA881) should be disregarded, and the other two taken as acceptable indications of the age of the sample.

These results suggest that the site was in use during the latter part of the Auckland archaeological sequence. The calendrical age ranges of the dated sample do not exclude the possibility of occupation well into the nineteenth century. However, the extent of the stone assemblage (Prickett 1989) and the absence of objects of European manufacture older than the late nineteenth century strongly suggest a late prehistoric occupation. It is likely that the site was occupied during the eighteenth century.

Published traditional evidence about pa in the vicinity of Kauri Point is conflicting (Davidson 1990:2-4). At least two different names have been suggested for the site in question. It has often been thought to be Te Matarae a Mana, the pa of Manaoterangi, a Kawerau chief who lived in the eighteenth century (Simmons 1980). The radiocarbon dates do not resolve the confusion about the name of the site, but neither do they conflict with the interpretation that this site was Te Matarae a Mana.

THE SURROUNDING VEGETATION

Nine bags of charcoal collected during the excavations were examined (by Wallace). Most of the larger pieces were separated out from each bag and identified. Each piece was snapped or cleaved along each of its three anatomical planes (transverse, tangential-longitudinal and radial-longitudinal), mounted on plasticine on a glass slide, and examined using a Carl Zeiss WL microscope fitted with an epi-illuminator based on a 150 watt Schott fibre-optic light source. The charcoal was examined at 50 and 100 times magnification under darkfield illumination and 200 and 500 times using plane polarised brightfield illumination. Identifications were based on Meylan and Butterfield (1978) and Wallace's own comparative material. The identifications are summarised in Table 1. Details of individual samples are given in Appendix 1.

Table 1. Summary of charcoal identifications from nine samples of 87 individual pieces.

Species	No. (%) of samples species occurs in	Total no. (%) of identified pieces
Manuka (<i>Leptospermum scoparium</i>)	6 (66.6)	45 (52)
Pohutukawa (<i>Metrosideros excelsa</i>)	5 (55.5)	25 (29)
Kauri (<i>Agathis australis</i>)	4 (44.4)	9 (10)
Matai (<i>Prumnopitys taxifolia</i>)	2 (22)	2 (2)
fern root (<i>Pteridium esculentum</i>)	1 (11)	3 (3)
Towhai (<i>Weinmannia silvicola</i>)	1 (11)	2 (2)
Rimu (<i>Dacrydium cupressinum</i>)	1 (11)	1 (1)

The fern root in this, as in other Auckland sites, is thought likely to be remains of growing plants burned in situ, rather than accidentally charred fern root brought to the site as food. The species present suggest three things: (a) the manuka and bracken an established clearing; (b) the kauri, matai, rimu, and towhai a kauri-based climax forest to the landward side; and (c) pohutukawa-covered slopes and cliffs on the harbour side.

Although the samples and identifications are too few for much to be discerned about the distribution of species in different parts of the site, it is notable that whereas manuka, and to a lesser extent pohutukawa are widely distributed, the podocarps are largely confined to Area B. This was the area on the central ridge top from which most of the stone tools were recovered. It was interpreted as a place where the inhabitants of the site gathered to work at artefact manufacture and repair and possibly also to work fibre (Prickett 1989:192; 1990:18).

DISCUSSION

One of the most striking features of the limited excavations carried out on the pa at Kauri Point was the very small amount of archaeological evidence revealed. The site appears to have been only briefly occupied by people who left few traces of their presence. It has been suggested that this is because it was built by people who came to the area for fishing, as oral traditions relate, but that most of their activities took place down in the bay, the pa perhaps serving only as a refuge and an expression of their mana (Davidson 1990:15). Soils in the area are poor and it is unlikely to have been attractive for horticulture. Although a few pits have now been discovered in the vicinity (K. Prickett, pers. comm.), these are the exception rather than the rule in the field evidence of an area that presents a marked contrast to volcanic zones of the Auckland region.

The charcoal identifications tend to support the interpretation that the general area was still forested when the pa was built. It may have existed in quite a small clearing between the harbour and the forest. In this case, it was probably occupied for brief periods during the fishing season.

The difficulties experienced with the radiocarbon determination and the normal caveat about reliance on a single sample, even without such difficulties, must make assessment of the age of the site still tenuous. The two determinations NZA1070 and NZA1735 indicate a late prehistoric or early post-European age, while the nature of the assemblage recovered from the site favours the former. Analysis of the stone assemblage suggested that the site's occupants lived under some stress and probably had difficulty procuring high quality stone for tools (Prickett 1989:197). This would be quite likely during the troubled times in the eighteenth century with which oral traditions relating to the area are concerned.

Acknowledgements. Janet Davidson would like to express her appreciation of the co-operation of the Nuclear Sciences Group, DSIR Physical Sciences, Gracefield, in investigating the problems associated with the radiocarbon date and the help and advice of Foss Leach in matters to do with radiocarbon dating. Support for the dating and the charcoal identifications from the Science Research Distribution Committee of the New Zealand Lottery Grants Board is gratefully acknowledged.

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APPENDIX 1. Charcoal identifications.

	No. identified pieces
Area A, square 1, fill of depression at base of bank	
Pohutukawa (<i>Metrosideros excelsa</i>)	1
Area A, square 2	
Manuka (<i>Leptospermum scoparium</i>)	10
Area B, square 1, layer 2 (first sample)	
Kauri (<i>Agathis australis</i>)	6
Pohutukawa	3
Bracken rhizome (<i>Pteridium esculentum</i>)	3
Towhai (<i>Weinmannia silvicola</i>)	2
Area B, square 1, layer 2 (second sample)	
Manuka	7
Pohutukawa	4
Matai (<i>Prumnopitys taxifolia</i>)	1
Kauri	1
Area B, square 1 extension	
Rimu (<i>Dacrydium cupressinum</i>)	1
Matai	1
Kauri	1
Pohutukawa	7
Area B, square 3, layer 2, spit 2	
Manuka	2
Area C, SW quadrant, layer 1	
Pohutukawa	10
Manuka	2
Area C, SE quadrant (lower), layer 3	
Manuka	14
Area D	
Manuka	10
Kauri	1